The Danger of Delaying Repentance;

Set forth in a

SERMON

PREACHED

TO THE

UNIVERSITY

AT

St. *Mary*'s Church in *Oxford*,

ON

NEW-YEARS-DAY, 169½.

By *Ar. Bury*, D. D. Rector of *Exon* Colledge.

LONDON,

Printed for *Nathanael Ranew* at the *Kings-Arms* in St. *Paul*'s Church-Yard, 1692.

The Dangerous Delusions of Repentance,

Set forth in a

SERMON PREACHED

TO THE

UNIVERSITY

AT

St. Mary's Church in Oxford

ON

New-Year-Day, 1692.

By Mr. Bury, D. D. Rector of Exon College.

LONDON:

Printed for Nathaniel Rowe at the Kings-Arms in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1692.

The Danger of Delaying Repentance;

Set forth in a

SERMON

Preach'd to the

University of Oxford, &c.

Exod. iv. 24, 25, 26.

And it came to pass by the way in the Inn, that the Lord met him, and sought to kill him.

And Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the fore-skin of her Son, and cast it at his feet and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.

So he let him go. Then (or as the vulgar Latin, better, *When*) *she said a bloody husband thou art, because of the Circumcision.*

MOses was now in a Journey, undertaken with great Reluctancy in absolute Obedience to God's repeated Commands: He made what shifts he could from the unwelcome Employment. First, on the People's part, he pleaded that

they would *not believe him*; then on his own part, that he was not qualified; and when he was answered in both, he fell from pleading to downright begging; *Then was the Lord's anger kindled against him.* Now therefore, without delay or dispute, he obeyeth the second Command, and by the way in his lodging (for Inns properly so called, there were none in those Days) by some præternatural Disease, which spake the immediate hand of God, he fell into imminent Danger of Death, and (by what Revelation we know not) the neglect of Circumcising his new-born Son, appeared to be the provocation: But the Disease which punished the neglect, now hinders the performance; and he must have perished, had not his Wife with a sharp *Knife* (for the word in the Hebrew is the same in *Joshua* 2. 2. where it is so translated) she circumcised the Child: And as the fore skin and blood fell at his feet, she uttered those words which our Learned *Mede* probably believed to have been the ritual Form in that Ceremony. For the word חתן doth not signify a *Husband*, but a Spouse not yet married, and was often used for the neareſt Allied: and in this Office might be used by the Circumciser to the Child, pronouncing him Circumcised, and by the *blood* of Circumcision betrothed to the Covenant: And this Opinion giveth a fair Account of the 26 *verse*, not otherwise easily proved worth mention.

So

So the ſumm of the Story is this, *Moſes* had not circumciſed his Son at the time preſcribed by the Law, which appointed the *8th.* day upon pain of death; he was about to ſuffer death as a puniſhment of That neglect; but eſcaped by his Wife's care in Performing what he had Neglected.

This neglect of *Moſes*, we may take as a Foil to illuſtrate that exact obedience of our Lord, which we this day commemorate. *Moſes* was the Mediator of a Covenant whereof Circumciſion was the Seal; our Lord was Mediator of a Covenant, whereby it was aboliſhed; yet did he ſubmit to it: and not only to Circumciſion, which was commanded, but to Baptiſm too which, without any command, was practiſed by ſuch as profeſſed ſingular perfection. For we read, *Matth.* 3. 13. *Jeſus came from Galilee to Jordan unto John to be baptized of him, but John forbad him, ſaying, I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comeſt thou to me? and Jeſus anſwering ſaid unto him, ſuffer it to be ſo now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteouſneſs, then he ſuffered him, i. e.* it is not neceſſary, indeed, but it *becometh* me, to *fulfil, i. e.* to be perfect in *All Righteouſneſs, i. e.* in what-ever is excellent.

Thus far the Letter: but the Collect for this day aſſureth us, that we do not thus ſolemnly celebrate the naked Hiſtory, but the Myſtery therein contained; which we find thus diſplayed, *Col.* 2. 10. *Ye are complete in him which is the head of all principality*

and

and power, in whom alſo ye are circumciſed with the circumciſion made without hands, in putting off the body of the ſins of the fleſh, by the circumciſion of Chriſt.

Godlineſs is ſo adæquately the end of all our Lord's actions, that not only his Moral, but even his Ritual Performances are thereto referred. Yea, not his Obedience only, but his Sufferings and Exaltation, his Death, Burial and Reſurrection are made Engagements, Encouragements, and Emblems of it. For ſo the Apoſtle goeth on, *Buried with him in baptiſm, wherein alſo ye are riſen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who raiſed him from the dead. And you being dead in your ſins and the uncircumciſion of your fleſh, hath he quickned together with him, having forgiven you all treſpaſſes.*

Nor is this the only Text wherein we find the Apoſtle at this holy Chymiſtry, diſtilling the Spirit out of the Letter.

This, this is truly to apply Chriſt to our ſelves. Thus doth our Church teach us to commemorate our Lord's Circumciſion, praying that God would *grant us the true circumciſion of the ſpirit.* Whereof to ſhew the Neceſſity, and the Danger of delaying it, I have thought it proper to view *Moſes*'s caſe, and apply it to our own in his Sin and his Danger.

HIS SIN was his delaying the Circumciſion of his Son beyond the time preſcribed by the Law. That this proceeded not from any compliance with his

his Wife or her Father (as ſome imagin) appeareth from this, that *Midian* was one of the Sons of *Abraham* by *Keturah*, and all Nations that came out of his Loins celebrated circumciſion; nor did *Mahomet* learn it of his *Jew*, but derive it from his Anceſtors. Beſides, we hear of another Son of *Moſes*, *Gerſom*, whom we therefore muſt believe to have been duly circumciſed, becauſe we find nothing to the contrary. It was not therefore his neglect of the Law, but the Time, which he delayed, not out of Contempt, but upon plauſible Reaſon. He was in a journey upon God's Errand, his Son ſo newly born as not to be able to undergo ſuch an operation, and then ſuch a journey. Such an excuſe God himſelf afterward approved in the whole people, who were all Uncircumciſed and Blameleſs, during a journey of 40 Years, as appears, *Joſ.* 2. I ſay not, that *Moſes* had Then God's approbation, but he might Then well judge That a competent excuſe, which God, in the like caſe, admitted for ſuch. And that this was *Moſes*'s reaſon, we may judge by his leaving his Wife and Child, to ſtay till they might return to her Father; of whom we read in the 18*th*. Chapter, that he brought them to *Moſes* in the Wilderneſs.

So the proper weight of *Moſes*'s guilt ſeemeth to be this, That he took his Wife and Child with him, and thereby caſt himſelf into ſuch circumſtances, as

made

made it neceſſary for him to delay his duty, till the journey were ended, and the Law tranſgreſſed. And what is ſuch an Errour in compariſon of ours?

The Goſpel maketh the circumciſion of the *Heart* no leſs neceſſary, than the Law made that of the *Foreskin*. That allowed 8 days reſpite, but This, by fixing no Future day, maketh every day of Delay a day of Diſobedience. God be bleſſed, there are not many who deny the duty to be neceſſary, but too many who hope they may ſafely delay it. And thoſe hopes they build upon the unhappy Tranſlation of the *Greek* word, which importeth *A Change for the future*, into a *Latin* one which ſignifieth only *A Sorrow for what is paſt*. For thence men raſhly, if not wilfully, infer that the Goſpel promiſeth pardon to every one that repenteth, and That may be done at any time; but never more ſeaſonably than in the laſt ſcene of life, when they ſhall have nothing elſe to do. And what is this but a defiance to the Apoſtle's caution, which the laſt time that I appeared in this place, we heard him give the *Galatians* in theſe words, *Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for what a man ſoweth, that ſhall he alſo reap.*

I ſhall now repeat no more of what I then ſaid, but this, That God hath eſtabliſhed the ſame Rule for the other life, as for this; That the Harveſt ſhall anſwer the Seed in Kind, yet ſo as to multiply it; but at ſome diſtance of time. For there is one time

to

to *ſow*, and another time to *reap*; and in this ſpiritual husbandry the earlieſt ſeaſon is alway the beſt: for Two great Reaſons. *Firſt*, *Becauſe delay multiplieth Difficulties*, and, *Secondly*, Becauſe it multiplieth *Dangers*.

1. It multiplieth *Difficulties*, becauſe by repeated Acts, the Habits will grow to a ſecond Nature, for ſo the Prophet declareth as little hope that thoſe who are *accuſtomed to do evil*, *ſhould learn to do well*, as there is that a *Black-a-moor ſhould change his skin*, *or a Leopard his ſpots*. And as Difficulties encreaſe, ſo do the Helps decay. The Light of Conſcience, the Word preached, and the Grace of God, by frequent baffles, loſe their power, and in time *grieving the Spirit*, cometh to *quenching* the Spirit.

It is a dreadful Conſideration, That the day of Grace is ſhorter than the day of Life; that there is *a meaſure of iniquity*, beyond which God's *Spirit will not ſtrive with man*, but leave the Reprobate to his own ways, wherein he muſt certainly periſh. This is lively ſet forth in the latter half of the firſt Chapter of the *Proverbs* of *Solomon*, wherein *Wiſdom* is perſonated, firſt, *Wooing*, then *Threatning*, and at laſt *Deſerting*, the obſtinate, and therefore, periſhing fool. This brought us to the Frontier of the other Argument againſt Delay, it multiplieth *Dangers*; which it is my preſent buſineſs to ſurvey, taking our view from *Moſes*'s Caſe.

I. God ſought not to ſlay *Moſes* in the field, but in his lodgings; but we are not ſure we ſhall die in our Beds.

II. *Moſes* knew his danger, but we know not when our diſeaſe is mortal.

III. When *Moſes* was diſabled, his Wife acted his part; but if our diſeaſe diſable us from Repentance, we cannot do it by Proxy.

IV. As ſoon as the Child was circumciſed, the deſtroying Angel left *Moſes* in ſafety: but we have no certainty that God will pardon us in conſideration of a Death-bed Repentance.

I. THE firſt danger is, That we may not die in our Bed, and thereby have opportunity to repent.

What, is there no other way to the Grave, but from the Bed? Or haſt thou any Revelation, that however many other ways there be, and however many other men paſs thoſe other ways, yet thou haſt a particular protection againſt them? What creature ſo Mean or ſo Weak, as not to be able to deſtroy the Wiſeſt and the Mightieſt man? *Anacreon*'s Wit could not deliver him from a Grapeſtone; nor Pope *Adrian*'s triple Crown, from a Fly; nor *Herod*'s joint Wit and Power, from Worms. *Zeuxis* was ſtrangled with a fit of Laughter, and many by a fit of Grief: Wine engageth one Man in a Quarrel, another in a Fever, a third in a Ditch, and others in other

other deſtructive Accidents. How many every Year fall by ſome violent Death? And what Year more fruitful than this in Apoplexies, which have knocked down, one in the Court where Laws are Made, another in That where they are Executed; one as he is about to ſleep, another when he is about to eat. Sudden Deaths are almoſt daily of thoſe who depended upon Death-bed-Repentance, with as much confidence as any of us, who ſurvive, perhaps to be made the like warnings to others.

From this ſlippery ſtation let us view the fall.

In play, we allow men to hazard ſo much as they may reaſonably ſpend upon one pleaſure; but thoſe who put their whole Livelyhood to the Mercy of a Die, are Blamed though they prove Fortunate, and Scorned if they be Ruined. Yet have they as much Hope of Gain as Danger of Loſs: But the Impenitent ſtaketh eternal Life againſt a Luſt, a Brutiſh Pleaſure, which is overpurchaſed at the much greater Loſs of that, which a vertuous man enjoys.

If it be pleaded, that there is great odds againſt this danger, becauſe thoſe who die in their Beds are many more than thoſe who die otherwiſe; we ought to reply, that a man ought not to ſtake his All againſt Nothing, though there were but one bad Chance in the Dice. And we are further to conſider, that if we were ſecure from this, yet there are other dangers. For,

II. A ſecond Danger is, that if we die in our Beds, we cannot Know, and are loth to Believe, that we muſt die by This Diſeaſe. For, on the contrary, all our worldly Friends and ſpiritual Enemies combine with our own Self-love to flatter us. The Phyſicians, by their Art, are obliged to fortifie their Patients Spirits, the better (if poſſible) to reſiſt the Diſeaſe; and by the ſame rules, all that come near him, muſt ſpeak Comfort, or Nothing concerning his Condition. So fondneſs for his eaſe tempts him to continue his Inveterate Practice of diſmiſſing his Repentance to a more *convenient ſeaſon*. Yea, ſo powerful is this fondneſs, that it infatuateth thoſe who have no hopes either to Eſcape their preſent ſickneſs, or to Continue any conſiderable time in it. The Conſumption which hath devoured all the inward and outward Fleſh, hath not conſumed this Humour: And in old men, this Diſeaſe is no leſs incurable than the natural Infirmities of Age. No man (ſaith *Seneca*) is ſo old *ut impiè alterum diem ſperet*; he may well hope to live ſome days longer, and one of thoſe days he will do the Work: but for the preſent he cries with *Solomon's* Sluggard, *yet a little ſleep, a little ſlumber, a little folding of the hands to ſleep*, and death cometh upon the one, as want upon the other, like a *Traveller* not Expected, and *an armed man* not to be Reſiſted. For the Bed cometh within

within that Petition in our Litany, *from ſudden death, good Lord, deliver us*; the Death that ſurpriſeth us unprepared, is *ſudden* in whatever circumſtances it ſeizeth us, whether in Bed, or Field.

Nor can it now be pleaded as before, That the odds is great in favour of the Impenitent; for the odds is come over to the other ſide. In the midſt of Doctors, and Nurſes, and Languors, this is no leſs properly a *ſudden Death*, than that which ſtrikes with *Lightning*. Yea, nor can it be denied to be in a fatal ſenſe *Sudden*, though *Expected*: For though the man know himſelf dying, yet

III. A third Danger is, that the ſame Diſeaſe which muſt ſhortly deprive the Man of Life, hath already deprived him of all Power, to do that which too late appeareth both *Neceſſary* and *Impoſſible*.

Moſes had a *Zipporah* to help him, but this ſpiritual Circumciſion cannot be performed by Proxy, nor ſo eaſily as the fleſhly. There are indeed, that talk as if it were much eaſier. It is no more but be *Sorry* and *Abſolved*. The former, *Nature* will perform; and the latter, the *Prieſt*: and the Death-bed is the moſt proper Seaſon for both. He that can do nothing elſe, can grieve for what is paſt, nor can that more Naturally or more Paſſionately be done, than at ſight of approaching Judgment. Body and Mind are beſt diſpoſed for this performance, when

when diſabled from all others. When old age ſhall ſtoop my back, then will my head naturally *hang like a Bulruſh*; when my head ſhall be full of Rheumatick Clouds, then will my Eyes eaſily rain plentiful ſhowers of Tears; when my Palate can no longer reliſh Wine or Banquets, nor any other parts of my Body feel pleaſure; then will it be eaſy to be ſick at remembrance of my ſurfeits. Or if I die by an acute Diſeaſe, the pain will force me to *howl upon my Bed.*

But alas! What is all this to *ſaving Repentance*? The Pſalmiſt promiſeth that *they which ſow in tears, ſhall reap in joy*; and immediately explaineth it, *he that now goeth on his way weeping, and beareth forth good ſeed, ſhall ſhortly return with joy, and bring his ſheaves with him.* It is the *good ſeed*, not the ſhowers without it, that produce the *ſheaves*: he that ſoweth nothing but Rain, cannot hope to reap any thing but Dirt.

This Spiritual Circumciſion is not like the Fleſhly, one ſhort act, but a conſtant courſe of life, not performed by a few drops, though of blood. It is no leſs than a *Death unto Sin*; but it is more, a *Reſurrection to Newneſs of Life.* Old habits are not eaſily deſtroyed, yet muſt this be done, and that by new habits of contrary Vertues; the one and the other are works of time and conſtant induſtry, they require the beſt of a man's powers, and the aſſiſtance of greater.

We

We cannot be too frequently admoniſhed, that this is the great deſign of the Goſpel, that all our Lords Actions and Sermons, Precepts and Promiſes, Death and Reſurrection relate to this, as Encouragements and as Emblems, and muſt be anſwered by the Duties they repreſent. His *Birth*, by our *Regeneration*; his *Circumciſion* by our *putting off the ſins of the fleſh*; his *Death*, by our *mortifying our old man*; his *Baptiſm and Burial*, by our ſpiritual burying deep our mortified Luſts; and his *Reſurrection*, by our *New* and better *Life*.

Let the malicious take notice, I deny not, with the *Socinians*, That Chriſt died to purchaſe Pardon for penitent ſinners: but I deny, and all the Apoſtles deny it with me, That any ſhall have benefit of his Purchace without participation of his Holineſs. Yea, I may further add, That the Apoſtles are more frequent in declaring that he redeemed us from the Dominion of ſin, than from its wages. And our Church Catechiſm teacheth us, that by *Baptiſm* is ſignified *a death to ſin, and a new birth to righteouſneſs, whereby we are made members of Chriſt*: and this ſure, is no eaſy or ſhort Work, nor wrought in a ſmall or buſy Time.

It requireth a *Chamber*, but a Council-Chamber, not a ſick man's. The Pſalmiſt preſſeth it with a *Selah*, Pſal. 4. 6. *Stand in awe and ſin not, commune with your own hearts, and in your Chamber, and be ſtill.* Selah.

Here

Here is a weighty Affair to be ſetled, a long Account to be ſtated, and a ſteddy Courſe to be ſtabliſhed. To this end, a ſolemn Conference to be held, all Parties heard, all Objections debated, all Pleas fully heard, that final Sentence may be given between God and Sin: Let therefore the Rabble be excluded, all Noiſe ſuppreſt, all Diſturbances prevented.

And can no privater Chamber be had than the ſick man's? No other wherein to be *ſtill*, but that which of all other is moſt troubleſome? How many Diſeaſes are there, that make any Conſult impracticable? The *Fever* by its Fires; the *Lethargy* by its Waters, the *Colick* by its Gripes, and moſt other Diſeaſes by their proper Torments, give the Patient buſineſs enough to employ his whole mind, and if he can bear them, he doth all that is poſſible for humane nature.

And thoſe Diſeaſes which do not utterly diſable the mind, do certainly diſorder it; If they do not make the Conſult utterly Impoſſible, yet they make it more Difficult than in the day of Health, when all Faculties are free, and all Powers entire, yet ſhun the work as too hard to be undergone.

Let us now ſuppoſe the man ſo happy, as to enjoy the concurſe of all the circumſtances of Death, which without warrant he promiſed himſelf. He dieth not a violent Death, but in his Bed. He is not deluded

deluded with vain hopes, but knoweth his Diſeaſe to be mortal; It is not a diſabling Diſeaſe, but a gentle, lingering one, which alloweth him full exerciſe of his faculties; and he employeth them all in the work which through the whole courſe of his life he cut out for this time. He is upon due conſideration ſo ſenſible of his paſt Follies and preſent Danger, as to be firmly reſolved that if God be pleaſed to grant him longer life, he will make it a new one, no leſs induſtrious in his ſervice than he hath formerly been in that of his luſts.

Theſe are the weak and dying Man's Reſolutions; And whether they be not weak and dying like himſelf, at another time may be queſtioned. General Experience telleth us, that the Reſolution which is brought by fear, departeth with it, and the former Life returneth with the health of the ſinner. But this Danger, ſince it hath no place in my Text, ſhall have none in my Diſcourſe: but I paſs by it to

IV. The laſt, but not leaſt Danger is, that God will not pardon the impenitent upon his late Repentance, as he did *Moſes* upon the late performance of his neglected Duty.

What hope there is for a wicked Man's repenting upon his Death-bed, is a queſtion more

diſputeable and more worth diſputing, than any, yea, than all of thoſe, wherein we weary our ſelves, and think them moſt Learned, that can ſpeak moſt of them to no purpoſe. Let me admoniſh and requeſt you to be ſo kind to your ſelves, as to allow ſome ſerious thoughts to this moſt important Queſtion which you cannot ſtudy in vain; and do not raſhly take every thing for Orthodox that is Vulgar.

The Queſtion is not concerning God's ſecret but his declared Will: not how for reaſons to himſelf alone known, he will deal with ſome particulars. For who dares pretend to ſuch knowledge? Our buſineſs is to enquire for God's declared Will, and that ordinary Rule whereby he profeſſeth to judge the World. *Search then the Scriptures, for in them ye hope* and muſt hope *to find the way to eternal life* clearly revealed. Search them, and if in them you find any one word, I ſay not of poſitive Promiſe, but of probable Intimation, that God will accept of a *Death-bed Repentance* in commutation for a *Holy Life*; then you may boldly depend upon it: But if on the contrary you meet in every page of the New Teſtament expreſs and frequent Declarations, in all kinds of ſtiles, that there is no other way to Happineſs, but by Holineſs; that our Lord's Deſign

in

in coming into the World was *to deſtroy the works of the Devil*, and at his ſecond coming he will *render to every one according to his works*; then, to depend upon any extraordinary Favour againſt his ſtabliſhed Rule, cannot be the practice of any wiſe or conſidering Perſon. This is a queſtion of Fact, your Bibles are Witneſſes, your care muſt be to examin them.

And when you do, you muſt not hope to find equal Weight in your own Deductions, and in clear Poſitions; nor equal Security in your own Apprehenſions of God's good Nature, and his own profeſſed way of exerciſing it.

Indeed thoſe hopes whereon men build ſo great a weight, are ſo weak that they are eaſily overthrown, and ſo few that they are eaſily reckoned up.

1. Some depend upon *God's natural Goodneſs*, which we gladly acknowledge to be Infinite: Otherwiſe, we ſhould not have Pardon offered upon ſuch eaſy Conditions, nor ſuch Rewards promiſed to ſuch ſlight Services, nor ſuch Patience exerciſed amidſt ſo many Provocations: But what hopes belong to the impenitent from this Goodneſs, the Apoſtle proclaimeth aloud, *Rom.* 2. 4. καταφρονεῖς; *Affronteſt thou the riches of his Goodneſs, and Forbearance, and Long-ſuffering, not know-*

ing that the Goodneſs of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardneſs and impenitent heart, treaſureſt up unto thy ſelf wrath againſt the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his works? Go now, and make the Goodneſs of God thy pedeſtal for impenitence.

2. Some preſume upon the Parable of the Labourers. He that came not till the *laſt hour*, ſped as well as thoſe that *bore the burden and heat of the day.* But conſider, that when he was interrogated why he *ſtood all day idle*; he anſwered, *becauſe no man hath hired me*: Canſt thou return the ſame Anſwer to the ſame Queſtion? Wert thou never invited to Repentance? However, I now invite thee, and thereby adjourn thee from this Parable, to the more pertinent one of the ten Virgins, *whereof five were wiſe, and five were fooliſh*: yet not ſo fooliſh neither, as to ſeek to ſupply their want of oil, with water, though drawn from their own eyes.

3. But the main ground of hope is the late converſion of the *good Thief*: which being a ſingle Example againſt a ſtabliſh'd Rule, muſt be an exact Tally, to our caſe in all material Circumſtances; but fails in many, eſpecially two moſt conſiderable, the Perſon and the Performance.

1. The

1. The PERSON is precariouſly taken for a wicked Man. I ſay *Precariouſly*, for we have no evidence of it. The Law made not the Croſs a puniſhment for Theft; the word in the *Greek* ſignifieth no worſe than a *Soldier*: that there had been a Sedition, we find, and may probably believe theſe two to have been of *Barabbas*'s Party; To fight for the holy People againſt the Heathen, was reckoned by the *Jews*, not only Innocent but Meritorious, and ſo the Man was not a *Thief*, but (perhaps) a *Zealot*: and though he confeſſed he ſuffered juſtly, in relation to the Government; yet his Zeal and good Intentions qualified him for mercy, eſpecially from a gracious Fellow-ſufferer. At worſt, if his Crime were great, yet will not This prove him a wicked Man. A good Man may fall into one great Fault, be taken in it, and die for it. That this therefore was a wicked Man, where is your *Evidence*? If you have none, where is your *Confidence*?

2. The PERFORMANCE was Extraordinary. When all our Lord's Diſciples and his very Apoſtles had forſaken him, when all that paſſed by reviled him, When his Fellow-ſufferer mocked him, when he was covered with ſhame and hatred of all the World, when in all Appearances and his own Apprehenſions he was forſaken by his Father himſelf; then

then did this happy Man, in defiance of all Diſcouragements, plead his Cauſe, and pay him his Devotions. And ſuch heroical Performances may, by a Gracious God, be accepted as Equivalent to a whole Life of Piety.

Here then is the Ground and Meaſure of the hopes that an Impenitent may depend on from this Example. If he can match the good Thief's Performance, he may expect the like Acceptation. But let him take this into the account, The Devils and damned Souls have the ſame title, even in Hell: When any one of them can ſo *love God* as the Goſpel requireth, he may obtain Eternal Life: Upon the ſame account, there is juſt ſo much hope of *Salvation* by a Death-bed-Repentance, as there is of ſuch a *Love*. And how much that hope may amount to, is our great Conſideration.

Either the man is ſenſible of his Danger, or he is not. He that is not, muſt die in his Impenitence. He that is ſenſible, muſt needs be tempted to hate God, as the Maleſactour doth his Judge. For this reaſon hath he alway wiſhed there were no God, whom in his own Defence, were it poſſible, he would deprive of his Being. However, he hath by all means endeavoured to deſtroy his own Senſe of him. He hath laboured to Drown it in ſtrong Drink, to Stifle it with worldly Care, or to Starve

it

it by any kind of Diverſion. He hath alway ſhunned the Fear of God, and it hath alway Purſued him, and now at laſt it hath Overtaken him, it Terrifieth, it Tormenteth him, it Amazeth him.

What now can be expected, but the Reverſe of St. *John*'s Aphoriſm, *Love when it is perfected caſteth out fear, becauſe fear hath torment*: the requital muſt be, that Fear when it is perfected caſteth out Love; and when is Fear perfected more than at the brink of Hell, when its Fires flaſh in the guilty Man's face?

Let us now give the dying Man a viſit, the firſt time (probably) wherein a Miniſter is welcome. It is no hard work to convince him of his paſt Follies at ſight of his preſent Danger: nor to rouze him to earneſt Reſolutions to Amend his life if it may be Prolonged: Himſelf believeth his Reſolutions to be unmoveable, and the Miniſter, in Charity, believeth ſo too. But is this more than the Rich man in Hell-Torments might equal? He that prayed to have ſome Meſſenger ſent to warn his Brethren, would he not gladly have had the commiſſion? and would he not have taken that warning to himſelf, that he was to carry to others? Such good Reſolutions then, may poſſibly be found in Hell; and if they cannot deliver out of Hell, there is ſmall hope that they can ſave any from it.

However,

However, Charity obligeth the Miniſter to give him ſome quieting drops of Spiritual *Laudanum*, which may (perhaps) give him ſome preſent eaſe, but can no more ſave his Soul, than the beſt *Opiate* can cure a Body whoſe Vitals are conſumed: Nor can they give any other than ſickly reſt while the Diſeaſe diſturbs it. I appeal to your own hearts, whether, at ſuch a time, you can hope to be ſo confident of your own Reſolutions and God's Pardon, as to have no *Fears* of Condemnation, and conſequently no *Wiſhes*, that there may be no God to judge you: For if there be, Love will be thereby deſtroyed, ſince every ſuch *Wiſh* is an Act of *Hate*, and that a Mortal one; for he that wiſheth it, doth his moſt towards taking away God's Being, and were it in his power, would effect it. On the other ſide, nothing is plainer, either in Scripture or Reaſon, than this, that nothing leſs than the Love of God can make a Man capable of enjoying him.

It is therefore abſolutely neceſſary, that the Miniſter apply all his Endeavours ſo to diſplay the Goodneſs and other Perfections of God, as to enamour the guilty and now terrified Soul, with ſuch powerful Love, as to make him Rejoice in him, and not retain the leaſt Wiſh to have him other than he is. And if he can, by the Aſſiſtance of God's Bleſſing upon his Endeavours, effect this, he works

works a great Miracle; he kindles the flame of *Heavenly Love* from the flaſhes of *Hell-Fire*; makes a Burning-Glaſs of Ice; enamours the Malefactour of his Judge; and ſuch a miraculous Converſion may well hope for a miraculous Mercy. But a wiſe Man will not hang his Eternal Happineſs upon ſuch Miracles: he will rather walk the ſafe way than truſt to ſuch a jump, as muſt bring him from the Deepeſt Hate, to the Higheſt Love, and take its Riſe from Fear, which puts at the greateſt diſtance from Love: Thoſe that do this, and fall ſhort into the bottomleſs Pit, may curſe God without End or Meaſure, but without Cauſe too, ſince he was not wanting to them in warning, wooing, and waiting; but They were wanting to themſelves, in ſlighting all his Invitations to Happineſs.

What-ever hath been ſaid, is intended for a Diſcovery of that Ordinary, Regular Courſe, which God hath revealed to be That wherein he will deal with all Mankind in general: How often or how far he will depart from it, in favour of any particular Perſon, upon particular Conſiderations, is not for us to enquire, nor to judge any Man, concerning whom we can know but *Little*, and that the Worſt.

Our Church hath taught us to hope well of every *departed Brother*, without excepting thoſe who

to us appear leaſt capable of it: and the Miniſter is to abſolve, *de bene eſſe*, thoſe who profeſs Repentance though late, for *Charity hopeth all things*: We have known ſome fall from great heights without hurt, and when we ſee a Man ſo falling, we hope he alſo will eſcape. But will not upon ſuch hopes caſt our ſelves down a Precipice: *Charity hopeth all things for our Brother*, but it Feareth all things for our Selves: And it is a monſtrous kind of Self-love, which, by keeping us in Impenitence, expoſeth us to ſuch a dreadful Gandelope of Dangers as we come now from diſcovering. We may not die in the Bed, which we appoint for the place of Repentance. If we die in our Bed, we may not believe it our Death-bed, and even then delay in hope of Recovery. If we know it to be our laſt Sickneſs, we may be thereby diſabled from thinking of any thing but the preſent Pain. If it be a gentle Sickneſs, and we do all that, in ſuch Circumſtances, is poſſible, we are not ſure that God will accept us. All this is practical, and needeth no other Application, but to our Memories.

And there we ſhall meet another ſuitable *Memento* from the Wiſe Man, *Eccleſ.* xii. 1. *Remember now thy Creatour in the days of thy Youth, while the*

the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou ſhalt ſay, I have no pleaſure in them. This is another Caution. God will have no Pleaſure, where the Votary hath none. He loveth a cheerful Giver of the Heart, as of the Alms. Nature hath taught all Mankind to worſhip him in a feſtival manner, in ſo much as the chief *Pontif* forbad a ſolemn annual Sacrifice, becauſe the people was in grief for their loſs at *Cannæ*; and we have leſs reaſon to hope that God, who forbad his people to offer him any blemiſhed or lean Beaſt, ſhould be pleaſed with the worſt of our days, becauſe we wilfully offer the beſt to his Enemies. Therefore *remember thy Creatour* in the beſt of thy days, while thy Spirits are brisk and vigorous, while the Wine may pretend to the Character which *Jotham* gives, that it *cheers God and man*, before it be ſoured to Vinegar by a ſharp diſeaſe, or ſunk to Lees by the dulneſs of Age.

But the *days of Youth* are many, the Wiſe Man therefore calls for N o w, a point without latitude, a ſhort point that paſſeth away before you can ſpeak the Syllable.

Behold, *Now is the time accepted, Now is the day of Salvation.* For,

1. Now is the *Preſent* time, we have it in poſſeſſion; but of to morrow we have no cer-

tainty: and in a caſe of the higheſt import, the ſureſt Courſe is the Beſt.

2. Now is a *Feſtival day*; one of thoſe few Feſtivals which our Church hath thought worthy to be honoured with a Collect which may out-live the next Sunday.

3. It is the beginning of the *New Year*, and therefore ſeaſonable for the beginning of a *New Life*. On this day the *Romans* (and (for ought I know) all civil Nations) uſed to ſend their New Years-Gifts to all thoſe whom they profeſſed to Love and Honour, and this ſo conſtantly, that the Emperors (ſome of them) required and exacted it as a Duty.

Let us therefore preſent to God the *Strena* which alone is worthy or capable of his acceptance: A *Circumciſed Heart*, lively repreſenting his own *Divine Nature*, and the performances of his only Son our Lord, *dead and buried to ſin, but riſen to newneſs of life, the old man put off with the old year, and the new man put on with the new one.* This, and only this New Years Gift, will God accept, and what he Accepteth will not fail to Reward. He is not like the Roman Emperors now mentioned, who ſo claimed a right to the *Strenæ*, or to reward the Payment only with a Diſcharge. When *Moſes* his Child was Circumciſed, *the*

Lord

Lord left him (ſaith the Text) but our Lord hath declared and promiſed, *If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.*

What this *Abode* in a Holy Soul importeth, we cannot reach, but may conjecture from what the Prophet ſaith of their *Meeting*, Iſai. 64. 4. *For ſince the beginning of the world men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye ſeen O God beſide thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him. Thou meeteſt him that rejoyceth and worketh righteouſneſs.* This the Apoſtle citeth, 1 *Cor.* 2. and in *ver.* 14. gives the reaſon. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are fooliſhneſs unto him, neither can he know them, becauſe they are ſpiritually diſcerned.* The ἀνὴρ ψυχικὸς, the *ſenſual Man*, cannot ſavour *ſpiritual Joys*: He muſt firſt put *off the old man*, which is a *Circumciſion*, Painful to Nature, and therefore ſhunned by it, but Neceſſary to be undergone, and the ſooner the better: nor did ever any one undergo it ſo early as not to repent that he had not done it ſooner, even for this among other reaſons, becauſe he has loſt as many Days of ſupreme Pleaſure as he hath ſpent in impenitence: ſo that in all that I have ſpoken concerning *Dangers*, I have acted as one of thoſe Servants which

which were *ſent out to the Hedges and High-ways, to compel men to go in to a Wedding-Feaſt*; whoſe Dainties exceed the boldeſt Wiſhes of the moſt Voluptuous: which is Another, a Better, a more Genuine, and Evangelical Motive againſt Delay, not now to be inſiſted on: nor ſhall I detain you longer than to call upon God, as the Church has taught us in the Collect appointed for this Day.

Almighty God, who madeſt thy Bleſſed Son to be circumciſed and obedient to the Law for Man; grant us the true Circumciſion of the Spirit, that our Hearts and all our Members being mortified from all worldly and carnal Luſts, we may in all things obey thy bleſſed Will, through the ſame thy Son Jeſus Chriſt our Lord, Amen.

FINIS.

Advertiſement.

THere are newly Publiſhed, Diſcourſes or Sermons on ſeveral Scriptures, 8vo.

An Expoſition on the Ten Commandments, with other Sermons, 4to. Both written by the Right Reverend Father in GOD, *Ezekiel Hopkins*, late Lord Biſhop of *London-Derry*.